

ATTENTION EDITORS

Paul's medical privacy bill moves forward quickly *Legislation, introduced this week, received hearings by House Rules Committee Thursday*

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WASHINGTON, DC - Reflecting the importance the House leadership is giving legislation introduced this week by Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), the House Rules Committee held a hearing Thursday night to consider his proposal to protect the medical privacy of Americans. Legislation introduced on Tuesday of this week by Rep. Paul would repeal a section of the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act which called for the creation of a federal database to essentially consolidate the medical history of every American and develop a national "medical identification" card.

"I'm pleased that the House leadership has recognized that this so-called 'medical ID' is a major intrusion by the federal government into the private lives of American citizens," said Rep. Paul, a physician for more than 30 years. "If the proposed ID goes through, the medical history of all Americans will be accessible to anyone with a grudge, or with malicious or criminal intent."

Text matching Rep. Paul's legislation, the Patient Privacy Act (HR 4281), was brought before the Rules Committee as an amendment to the Patient Protection Act

, which will be voted upon on Friday. Rep. Gerald Kleczka (D-Wisconsin) is a co-author of the amendment and has worked closely with Rep. Paul on this issue. The Rules Committee had not yet reached a decision on the amendment Thursday evening, but it is likely the medical ID issue will be brought up during floor debate on Friday.

Seen as a consistent fighter for constitutionally limited government and civil liberties, Rep. Paul said the medical identification card is a major encroachment on the right to privacy.

"The medical ID would allow federal bureaucrats, and possibly every medical professional,

hospital, and HMO in the country, to access an individual's record simply by entering the 'identifier' into a national database. I've asked my colleagues how comfortable they would be confiding an emotional problem - or even an embarrassing physical problem like impotence - to their doctor if they knew that this information could be easily accessed by a political foe, HMOs, and even government agents. Think of the numerous cases of IRS abuses that have recently been brought to Congress' attention, or the history of abuse of FBI files in the Executive Branch, or even the case of a Medicaid clerk in Maryland who accessed a computerized database and sold patient names to an HMO."

Such a database system could have a chilling effect on treatment for life-threatening conditions.

"As a physician, I know that effective treatment depends upon a patient's ability to place absolute trust in his or her doctor. But how can there be trust when patients know that any and all information given the doctor will be placed in a database accessible to anyone with the patient's 'identifier?'"

Paul said Congress must act quickly to protect the privacy of Americans from prying eyes.

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